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ABSTRACT

The current economic outlook, including the prospectus of high unemployment rates, creates new objectives and new perspectives to the growing national phenomenon known as the mid-life career change. During the past five to seven years we have witnessed the growth and development of adult counseling centers, whose primary focus is to provide vocational and educational counseling for older individuals. While institutions of higher education have adapted their programs and curriculum to meet adult educational needs and have responded to the changing vocational and personal needs of individuals in their middle and older years, what remains to be tackled is the adoption of the world of work to the work needs of those in mid-life and later life through: (1) enforcement of existing state and federal legislation with respect to age discrimination in employment: (2) education and public affairs programs that demonstrate that older people are good workers; (3) research into the relationship between aging and intelligence; and (4) new policies from government and the private sector that provide meaningful options for the individuals in middle years and older. (Author/KE)

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MID-LIFE NEEDS:

ASSESSMENTS AND RESPONSES

A Keynote Address

by

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At first glance, the topic of this conference sounds quite idealistic. We are, after all, in the midst of the worst recession since the nineteen thirties and unemployment is at unconscionably high levels. How can we talk about mid-life career mobility and work flexibility at a time like this? Moreover, the forecasters are telling us that while recovery is likely to begin soon, high unemployment - at the seven or eight percent aggregate levels - is likely to characterize our economy for the next several years.

Institutions - in both the private and public sectors - have found that they can survive fairly well during these difficult times on austerity budgets. It is unlikely that they will begin massive re-hirings as their earnings or resources increase. Personnel and labor costs, including expensive fringe benefits, are likely to loom large in the minds of competitive budget conscious planners. Although these considerations may result in greater productivity per employed worker, it may also mean, as the labor analyst A. H. Raskin, has written, that "The skills, energies and hopes of millions of unemployed workers will remain on the junk pile long after the gross national product starts climbing again."

We cannot conduct a conference on mid-life career changes without recognizing the economic realities of our day and facing them directly. It is my view that the near-term economic outlook - including the prospects of high unemployment rates - serves to

increase the importance of our discussions. It also creates new objectives and new perspectives to the growing national phenomena known as the mid-life career change.

Let me step back for a moment to briefly give you the reasons why the concept of mid-life redirection has developed in our society. I will then talk about how the counseling profession and educational institutions have responded to mid-life vocational needs. I will conclude by suggesting pathways and policies for the future which may not only increase mid-life career flexibility but also increase the work options for older citizens in a job-short economy.

There are fundamental life-style and career path changes which are taking place in our society. These changes are causing older persons to rethink and replan their futures at a time of their lives when previous generations gave little though to such processes. Let me briefly list these changes:

1. The life-span expectancy is increasing while the work-life expectancy is decreasing. In 1900 the twenty year old working man could expect to spend 6.6% of his life in retirement; by 1970 this percentage had increased to 15.6%. Indeed, Bernice Neugarten, Professor of Human Development at the University of Chicago has characterized the growing numbers of retired persons as a new meaningful division of the life cycle. She calls them the young-old; the group mainly 55 to 75 years of age, distinguished from the middle-aged by retirement and contrasted from the old-old by reasonably good health and continued social involvement.

2. The number of women who have entered or returned to the labor force has increased dramatically. The female labor force participation rate has risen from 28% in 1940 to more than 42% in 1973. The more education a woman has, the more likely she is to be in the labor force. In 1970 only 23% of women with less than eight years of schooling were employed; while 50% of those who had completed high school and 71% of those who had four years of college or more were labor force participants.

3. The growing numbers of marital separations and divorces has led to an increase in what we can call the ultimate nuclear family - households headed by single individuals. According to the April 1974 Ford Foundation report on opportunities for women, households headed by females increased 32% from 1959 to 1970 compared to a 16% increase for households headed by husbands and wives. If this trend continues, the individually headed household might very well become the normative family structure in our society.

4. The emerging interest of members of the psychological, sociological and anthropological professions in the aging process has led to studies which examine the middle years in greater detail. As a result of recent and on-going research we are discarding previously held

myths about adulthood - especially those which characterized the mature years as a plateau of stability and relative evenness in the life span. We now know that these can be years of profound crisis, change and personal growth.

Again, Bernice Neugarten has provided important clues. As one begins to perceive the finiteness of ones life, as one's perception of time changes from the 'years ahead' to the 'years-left-to-live', profound alterations can take place in ones attitudes and behavior. For the male, middle-age is defined both by ones career (the confrontation of ones aspirations with ones achievements) and by ones health (the onset of serious illness experienced by male friends and colleagues). For the female the cues are family oriented. Children reaching adulthood can make women either painfully or joyfully aware of the emptiness or new options which accompany middle age.

5. The various studies of work alienation indicate that it is among white collar workers where job dissatisfaction is likely to increase as one grows older. For the blue collar worker, aging often brings seniority rights, protection from layoffs and increased pension benefits

> The older white collar worker, by contrast, can find him or herself reaching a static level of responsibility which can lead to boredom and frustration in the large organizations which dominate both the private and public sectors of our economy. Left untreated, the mid-career crisis can lead to behavior which is destructive of personal and family life patterns.

What I have tried to illustrate thus far is that there is no such thing as a constancy to the life or career pattern in middle-age. Leaving aside the traumatic effects of recession induced unemployment upon older workers we can see that significant social changes are taking place in our society. These movements are causing adults to rethink their futures at a time of life when previous generations gave little thought to such processes. Let us look now at how the counseling profession and educational institutions have responded to these changes.

During the past five to seven years we have witnessed the growth and development of adult counseling centers thoughout the country. Often initiated by women who were seeking guidance and advice about new life styles and career patterns, these centers are now helping men and the middle-aged to find answers to both personal and career dilemmas. These adult counseling centers are often staffed by part-time para-professionals working under the supervision of trained staff.

They are funded through fee structures or through grants from federal, state or local agencies. Some are free standing and others are associated with existing institutions - often a college or university. Their primary focus is to provide vocational and educational counseling for older individuals. Some thirty-five of these adult counseling centers were studied in a recent report of the State Education Department in New York. The author, Dr. Lucy T. Comly, found evidence that the public has responded to these centers with enthusiasm.. As she writes,

> "With virtually no advertising campaign, the New York City Regional Center for Lifelong Learning received over 5,000 telephone inquiries in its first year of operation. With public advertising, calls reached 100 per day in January 1975. In two years the Providence, Rhode Island Career Education Project, which does advertise, has had 5,000 call-ins; 4,000 of these became clients, each of whom received six or seven phone-counseling sessions lasting thirty to forty-five minutes a-piece. The Syracuse New York Regional Learning Service has had 1500 one-time contacts in its first ten months of operation in addition to 170 three month consultation clients and 250 workshop participants."

Although centers such as these focus primarily upon providing educational and career services, they are in a unique position to uncover and aid other personal dilemmas associated with the adult years. Referral networks have emerged in many metropolitan and suburban areas linking adult counseling center personnel to the

trained individuals who can deal with the more complicated psychological and psychiatric needs of those who originally sought advice about a career or educational program. And the reverse flow can also occur: We at Stony Brook's Mid-Career Counseling Program have seen individuals referred to us by local mental health agencies. These persons, now ready to resume productive employment, can benefit from our knowledge of existing educational and vocational options in the Long Island region.

The growth of the adult counseling centers has led to the development of materials to serve their needs. The Catalyst organization, for example, distributes up-to-date information about work options for women to some 100 counseling centers across the country who are part of Catalyst Network. A recent publication from the Education Development Center in Newton, Massachusetts indicates that it has prepared manuals, film strips and bibliographies to help counseling centers to work more effectively with adults.

We at Stony Brook have developed what we believe to be a pioneering graduate level program in mid-life assessment. This four course program is directed primarily toward individuals who wish to learn about the psychological, sociological and economic aspects of middle and older age. In early March my office mailed a preliminary announcement about the program to some 335 persons: members of the Nassau and Suffolk Counties guidance and counseling profession and members of the Suffolk County Personnel Society. Within ten days, eighty-four responses were received; eighty-three of them favorable.

The program will begin in autumn 1975. It is my hope that these courses will become the core of a multidisciplinary graduate level degree program which focuses upon the relationship among work, personality and the aging process.

Two other developments should be noted with respect to the counseling profession's response to adult mid-life needs. The National Vocational Guidance Association has established a Commission on Mid-Life Careers which is planning a national conference devoted to this topic; and the American Psychological Association journal "The Counseling Psychologist" is devoting its January 1976 issue to the topic "Counseling Adults."

Educational institutions, like the counseling profession have also responded to adult needs. Part of their activities have been motivated by self-interest; declining numbers of traditional younger students have accelerated the interest of colleges and universities in the older but newer clientele.

In December 1973, Herbert Bienstock, regional director of the Bureau of Labor Statistics in New York City estimated that one out of every fifty men and women aged 35 and over are returning to school part-time to either refresh their knowledge in their present occupations or to study for a new career. The October 1972 census showed that 1.5 million adults over 35 were enrolled in colleges, trade or vocational schools, and elementary or secondary school programs.

We are now familiar with the multitude of ways institutions of higher education have adapted their programs and curriculum to meet adult educational needs. Flexible course hours, short term courses, limited residence requirements, liberalization of age restrictions, eased transfer of course credits, credit by examination, credit for life experience, refresher courses, reorientation courses, adult counseling services, child-care facilities and even financial aid for part-time students are now available to adults in some measure at most educational institutions across the land.

I think that both the counseling profession and educational institutions have responded to the changing vocational and personal needs of individuals in their middle and older years. What remains to be tackled is to begin adapting the world of work to the work needs of those in mid and later life.

We can provide excellent counseling services and imaginative educational and training programs but they will be of little value if they do not lead to meaningful and satisfying employment for those who desire new career paths in mid-life. For those affected by the recession; for those who must retire prematurely; for those who desire to enter the labor force in mid-life; for those who are single heads of households;for those who have undergone mid-life personal change; and for those who are disillusioned with their present vocations; we must develop new approaches to the creation and design of mid-life jobs and career paths.

The first step we can take is to enforce the provisions of existing state and federal legislation with respect to age discrimination in employment. The second is to emphasize - through education and public affairs programs - that older individuals make good employees and workers. The maturity, sensitivity and wisdom which comes with age can be decisive assets in many fields and professions. Third, we can continue our research into the relationship between aging and intelligence, aging and the ability to learn and aging and productivity. There is much evidence now in all three areas to completely debunk long held myths about decline and decay in the older years.

Finally we must seek new policies from government and the private sector which would provide meaningful work options for individuals in middle and older years. A portion of vocational opportunities might be designated as part-time positions for those who do not wish full-time work. Part-time work options might prove particularly attractive for those who are in retirement or those who have young children. Preliminary productivity studies of part-time workers in fields such as social work indicate that as much or more can be accomplished by two half-timers than one full-time worker. In addition, more full-time mid-life jobs and career options must be created. Government subsidies to private employers to hire older workers might prove more productive than federally financed re-training programs which do not guarantee jobs for program

participants. Tax incentives or other financial tools might be utilized to stimulate new work opportunities. Management, labor, government and education must cooperate if we are to mobilize our talents to create sufficent work options for those who desire them.

There are of course, political as well as economic considerations which must be overcome in the job creation process. Yet we must not underestimate the political power of the middle and older aged. Increasingly they are becoming a highly educated segment of the population. Moreover, they vote. As Neugarten has cited, overall political participation, when corrected for income levels and educational levels, is highest for persons 51 to 65. The middle-aged are thus disproportionately influential in the political process.

Awareness of this political influence, coupled with the cooperation of counseling groups and educational institutions can create meaningful new work and career paths for those in mid-life and beyond.

Perhaps this exciting conference at Florida Technological University can help develop those new perspectives in the world of work which will lead to increased mid-life options for us all.